

SFX: Opening Moves

by Abyss

Category: X-Men

Genre: Adventure

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 1999-03-13 09:00:00

Updated: 1999-03-13 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 09:38:35

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,770

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: You're a hip young mutant, and Magneto is about to kick your butt. Have a nice day.

SFX: Opening Moves

ABYSSmal productions presents: SFX: Opening Moves

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"Ask not what your government can do for you, rather, ask what your government can do to you." - Abyss

on with the show...

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"It's good to see you again, Windrider. I wasn't sure you'd come."

"Forge, even with all that has passed between us, Goddess willing, I will ever be at your call."

"Likewise, Ororo. But I'm afraid this is business. You know I've ended my association with the government." "A wise decision, given how the X-Factor project ended. Pro-mutant sentiment is at low ebb."

"Yes, but that isn't preventing those in power from making use of us."

Here, take a look."

"How did you get these files?"

"I still have a few contacts. Charles' Mutant Underground is still in place."

"Goddess! These mutants... some of them are but children..."

"No. Not children. Weapons. Our old friend Bowser has a hand in this."

"The man who initiated the Hound program? The project that turns mutants into hunters of their own kind?"

"That's the one. It's on hold after that mess with Sabretooth, but as you can see..."

"This project may be infinitely worse."

"It may. With X-factor gone, the US needs to show foreign governments and industry leaders it is dealing with the mutant menace. This may be the answer."

"Surely the President would never allow this."

"Ororo, this is so covert, I doubt he even knows. The US government is turning young mutants into their own personal strike force. Great Maker preserve us all if they are allowed to continue."

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Anthony Bowser was a happy man. For the first time in what seemed like an eternity, everything was going according to the Plan. Now if he could just persuade the man sitting across from him to agree with the Plan, his joy would know no bounds.

"Am I to understand that you consider the mission a success?" Henry Gyrich's tone was plainly sceptical. The career government man looked at Bowser through thick glasses that made his eyes seem to bulge. Bowser met the exaggerated stare evenly. Plump, bald, and on the high side of middle age, Bowser's dark eyes still glittered with the ambition of a man twenty years his junior. Henry Gyrich was a man of some influence in the Intelligence community, and Bowser intended to win the man's support.

"Absolutely." he responded, his tone even and friendly, "We accomplished our goal and there was no exposure of the operation."

"No exposure? Nearly a quarter million in property damage to a major bank, three bystanders in the hospital, not to mention two of your operatives injured and one in a coma. How was there 'no exposure'?"

Gyrich leaned forward, running a hand through short red hair as he shook his head, scepticism evident. His tone caused Bowser to frown. The motion just barely caused his heavy jowls to crease. He sat back in his chair and crossed his hands on his ample stomach. When he spoke, his voice was even and relaxed.

"The damage and casualties will be written off as mutant terrorism, and we were prepared for operative fatalities. Mere injuries are well within acceptable bounds."

"I'm not convinced."

"Perhaps if we review the details of the mission?"

"I've already read the report." Gyrich said, shifting as if preparing to rise and leave the office.

"The report was lacking many details which I will supply." Bowser offered, his tone at once respectful and wheedling,

"Please, Mr. Gyrich, I think you will find this most enlightening."

"Fine, Bowser. I'm listening."

"Excellent. As you are aware, this was the operatives' first field mission..."

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The Chase Manhattan Bank is popularly considered one of the most prestigious financial institutions in the world. It looked the part. Sixty foot high ceilings, baroque-wood furniture, marble pillars polished so bright a patron could see their face in the stone, and of course, the very best service a client could hope for.

Nigel McCrumb was a part of that service. No mere teller, he was a financial transaction consultant, thank-you-very-much. It was his job to provide for the client's every banking need. It was a duty he took very seriously. After all, one did not move up to dealing with the Bank's really important clients if one did not properly serve the lesser ones. Why, that very morning he had handled a number of minor transactions for a thoroughly scruffy looking individual with the most atrocious french-accent. He was reminded of that individual now as he observed his latest clients. Much like that man, they were wearing sunglasses, even indoors. Nigel prided himself on first impressions. He instantly pegged the young man as wealthy and comfortable with his wealth. Tall, with long dark hair that was tied back from a face that would not look out of place on the cover of GQ. The narrow, trendy sunglasses hid his eyes, but the high cheekbones and sharp features spoke of excellent breeding. The hint of dark stubble suggested a hint of disdain for looking as clean-cut as he appeared. The Armani suit was perfectly cut and tailored, a dark blue, almost black, with a perfectly matched tone-on-tone grey tie and shirt. McCrumb figured him to be the son of some wealthy family, here to acquire funds for a holiday. This impression was further reinforced by the companion on his arm.

The woman, or perhaps girl might be more accurate, was dressed as well, if not better, than her escort. A black silk blazer over expensive blouse and a leather skirt that almost rippled against her slim figure painted a picture of wealth. The picture was tarnished, however, by its framing. The blazer was wrinkled, one lapel slightly askew. The white blouse was one button away from indecency, showing a hint of black lace, and one of her nylons had an obvious run. She

wore low heel leather pumps that seemed far more comfortable than fashionable, and her free hand seemed to flutter by her side as if she wanted to adjust something and couldn't. McCrumb glanced at her face last of all. He could be mistaken, but he thought he saw just a hint of a tattoo around the edge of the wide dark sunglasses.

Just as well to deal with them quickly, McCrumb thought.

As they approached his desk, Nigel stood and gestured towards the seats in front of his desk.

"Sir, madam, please have a seat. My name is Nigel Mc..."

"I'm here to see mister Turner." the young man said, his voice even and demanding.

Nigel stiffened, but quickly recovered himself.

"Director Turner is a very busy man. I believe he is with an important client just now. If you would..."

The young man waved his hand in a cutting gesture.

"Inform mister Turner that Jacob Worthington junior is here to see him."

"And we don't have all day, Nige'." The girl added, her tone mocking McCrumb's Bostonian accent.

McCrumb restrained a frown and picked up the phone.

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"Wherever did you find that particular name?"

"We have detailed files on all publicly known mutants. Turner was friends with Warren Worthington's father for years before his death. Our analysts were certain even the suggestion of an illegitimate son would catch his interest. Pure fabrication, but it only had to get them into the director's office..."

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A smiling secretary who wore her hair so tight it looked painted on met the couple as they stepped from the elevator into the reception area.

"Mr. Turner is just finishing with a client and he will be right with you."

"That will be fine." The young man said, walking towards a line of paintings on the wall, all but dismissing the secretary. The young woman seemed to interest herself in a stack of magazines. She seemed distracted, flipping through pages absently without really paying attention. Her eyes kept scanning the room, her hand moving towards her face as if to scratch at something, but always stopping short. The man removed his sunglasses, revealing green, almost emerald eyes. The woman left hers on. The secretary barely concealed her disapproval and returned to her desk. A moment later a door to the side of her desk opened and the sounds of voices came from within.

"...certainly appreciate you coming to me with this matter, mister Ericson, and..."

Turner walked out first, looking back at the man who followed him as he held the door open. The two young people in the reception area stood separately, their attention instantly on the new arrivals. The man who followed Turner was tall, of an indeterminate middle age, dressed in a perfectly cut grey suit. His white hair was combed back, and his eyes took in everyone in the room instantly. Jacob Worthington' calmly touched his right hand to the watch on his left. For an instant their eyes met, emerald green and ice-blue. Ericson' instantly held out his hand and the watch flew from the young man's wrist, dissolving into powder in mid-air. The atmosphere in the room was suddenly electric, as if a lightning strike was moments away. The young man held out his hand and a green ball of light the size of a basketball, almost solid in appearance, blinked into existence. The woman giggled nervously and dropped into a weaver's stance, legs apart, left hand bracing the right, right forefinger extended as if her hand were a pistol.

"Freeze, Whitey!" she shouted.

Turner looked shocked, the secretary scandalized. The white haired man, 'Ericson', shoved Turner out of the way even as the other two attacked.

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"They actually attacked him? Just like that? I thought Taskmaster taught them better than that?"

"Their job was to activate the beacon for the rest of the assault team and attack if they had the element of surprise. When the beacon was destroyed, Sheath figured he had nothing to lose."

"Obviously, if he was dumb enough to attack Magneto with only the girl for back-up."

"The girl, Nihil, was more effective than he was. And they didn't know it was Magneto."

Gyrich leaned forward, almost falling out of his seat. "You \_didn't\_ tell them?"

Bowser shrugged. "It would have affected their confidence, what little there is of it. We told them he was a telekinetic."

"A TK wouldn't have sensed the beacon activation."

"Yes. I'm rather cross with the tech-lab about that."

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Sheath was thrown against a wall even as his power manifested. The ball remained in place, hovering in mid-air. Nihil had been out of Magneto's immediate line of sight because of Turner. She had just enough time for one attack. A narrow beam of red light flashed from her finger towards the master of magnetism. There was an audible

crackle as his personal force-field reacted to it, followed by a grunt. Magneto's hand flew to his side as he hissed in pain. Nihil joined Sheath against the wall in an instant, a cry of triumph cut short as she slammed against the wood panelling hard enough to crack it. Her hands were enveloped in cables and wiring that tore out from the plaster like tentacles. Magneto looked down at his hand. Dark red blood from the wound in his side glistened on the palm. His shield had been only partially effective. The girl's attack had been deflected and minimized, but not stopped. He could feel the wound. It was only a graze, and hardly worrisome. He closed it by hardening the iron in his own blood even as he turned his attention back to his attackers. The secretary and Turner fled down an emergency staircase. He paid them no mind. They were inconsequential compared to these new enemies. The air itself crackled as he flew towards his captives. The girl, and she could be no more than eighteen, seemed to try to burrow back into the wall, struggling against her bonds. Her sunglasses had fallen off and he noted an ankh made up or tattooed over her right eye. Both her eyes opened wide as he approached, his suit reforming into an infamous blood-red bodysuit and cape.

"Shit, you're... no way... you're..." she couldn't seem to force her tongue to work. Her jaw was too busy dropping. "Oh geez, oh geez..."

"I am Magneto. You have assaulted me, and you will explain who sent you, and why." His voice was accented, deep, and held all the promise of a distant thunderstorm. His eyes, shining beneath the rim of the almost legendary helmet, were nearly white with energy, the aura around him only slightly less so.

"...they didn't tell us... we didn't know... we thought...", she was crying now. Tears highlighted fine lines of circuitry overlaying the black of the ankh on her face.

"Who, girl? Who sent you?"

"She won't tell you."

The young man's words drew Magneto's attention upon him. He flinched at the force of the older man's gaze, and the tingling that suddenly appeared in every nerve in his body.

"Then you will, boy. Or I will burn the very blood in your veins."

Sheath could feel the tingling intensify. He concentrated on the ball of light, still floating in the middle of the room. The ball flowed like liquid, resolved itself into a spear-like form, and flew towards Magneto's back. It dispersed mere inches from the red cape. Sheath gasped in pain, his head thrusting back against the wall. Unable to move, all he could do was scream. Magneto's voice only barely pierced the veil of pain in his head.

"Your solid-light construct is energy based. Easily disrupted. When you recover, we will continue."

Sheath's only response was a rictus of pain on his face and a sound that was almost a whimper. Magneto turned back to Nihil.

"Now, answer me, girl. Who. Sent. You?"

Her eyes still wide with fear. She shook her head. Magneto held his fist before her face. The air around it was alive with pure white flame.

"I can sense the cybernetics in you, girl. I can cause them to short-circuit. As many of the implants are in your head, I imagine that will be quite painful. Or I can manipulate the metals in your very blood, and leave you no choice but to answer me. The choice is... eh?"

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"Could he have actually discovered the information? Your whole operation could have been blown."

"Not at all. All our operatives have deeply engrained subliminal directives against such disclosure. She would have passed out first."

"And had it been a telepath questioning her?"

"We have our own telepath, Mr. Gyrich... may I call you Henry?"

"No. And I have doubts about your telepath's usefulness. Is she at least more effective than your teleporter? The girl dropped the rest of the team practically in his lap."

"Magneto's sensitivity to energy fluctuations has never been fully determined. We could hardly have known he would sense her teleport so readily as to eliminate the element of surprise. Tess is skilled in her talent, but not subtle. "

" Is'... or was'?"

"That remains to be seen. And do not underestimate Rainbow, by the way. Her telepathy levels are quite impressive."

"Sure. When her brain settles on who she is long enough to use them."

"That is not a matter for concern. Rainbow is not a field operative."

"And the rest of them are?"

"Indeed..."

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Nihil watched Magneto calmly turn even as the very air above the secretary's desk seemed to fold in on itself like a translucent flower drawing its petals shut. The distortion burst open' with a loud sound like paper tearing and four figures hurled themselves out of the breach in reality. Magneto waved his hand and all were frozen in mid air. A whimper of shock and disappointment escaped her as the rest of the team was immobilized like flies in a web.

Magneto studied them, still maintaining his grip on the other two.

His glowing eyes took in their appearances with a look that was at once threatening and evaluating. They were all young, late teens, early twenties at the most. Of the four new arrivals he held in his electromagnetic grip, one was obviously a mutant. His skin had the appearance of reptilian scales, albeit flesh tone. His eyes slitted like those of a snake. He even had four fangs that flashed in his mouth as he struggled against invisible bonds, hissing at his captor. He also held two long kris, wavy blades that were quickly reduced to dust as Magneto turned to the other captives. Two males and a female. The girl had poorly dyed blue-hair, wore a loose black jumpsuit, and almost glowed to his eyes with the signature energy of the teleport that has brought them there. Of the other two, the first, a young man with acne scarring and dishevelled hair, looked to be not at all concerned with his immobility. Wearing black coveralls like the girl, he floated, arms wrapped around himself, and looked at Magneto like a child might study a circus clown. He even... giggled? Magneto turned to inspect the final member of the group, a young black man who met his gaze, then closed his eyes. There was only the briefest sense of energy building. Magneto strengthened his shield, tightening his grip on the man, only to have the magnetic energy bonds shatter in an pyrotechnic explosion of flesh and blood. The sudden shower of crimson against his shield made even Magneto, a survivor of some of the worse atrocities in the history of war, flinch. Then feedback effect hit. For an instant, the very magnetic forces that Eric Lehnsherer commanded were turned against him. It took a huge effort to disperse the effect and recover control of his powers. In those few seconds all other concerns were temporarily left aside. Those seconds were all it took.

Sheath was off the wall and ignoring the pain in his spine and head to yell at the others. "Taipan, Tess, hang back with Flux. Nihil, Bones, hit him hard!"

Magneto heard the words even as he cleared his head and restored his shield. Instantly he was struck from two sides. Where the black youth had stood there was now only a bloody skeleton standing without assistance from muscle or tissue, surrounded by flames so dark red as to be almost black. He raised his hands and the flames leapt forth. Magneto could feel the heat even through his shield. The leader's hard-light construct reappeared in a long axe-like shape, striking at his forcefield. The energy form whirled in mid-air as if it were wielded by an invisible viking, crashing against his barriers again and again. Neither attack could penetrate his shield by themselves, but they were distracting his strength from the real threat, the girl with the tattoo, Nihil.

Fury and fear played across her face as she aimed her arm, one finger extended as if she were pulling the trigger on an invisible gun.

"Hey Mags! Eat this!" She shouted.

Her right eye glowed as Nihil activated the targeting circuitry implanted in her optic nerves and linked to her arm. The crosshairs flitted across her vision as she took aim.

The feedback had shaken Magneto, and he remembered how the girl had nearly penetrated his shields. If she got a clear shot, he might not be strong enough to deflect it. A swarm of metal objects, pens, paperweights, doorknobs, all flew from about the room, striking her



from all sides. She cursed and lifted her arms to protect her face. He could see the teleporter and the snake-like mutate standing to the side, holding the giggling one between them.

\*First things first.\* he thought. He might not be able to take them all out with his customary ease, but there were simpler ways. His hands extended and Sheath and Bones found themselves hurled to the walls. Magneto felt the skeletal one's energy field resist his own. Had the contact been longer, the effects could have been severe. The girl, Nihil, dropped to the ground and pointed her finger at him again, cursing loudly. A water pipe burst through the floor and threw off her aim. A thin beam of light left her fingertip and pierced a wall, leaving only a small round burn mark the diameter of a penny. The pipe wrapped around her face, taking her out of the fight as she struggled to pull it away. Magneto turned his attention to the remaining three. The snake-man drew two new blades from sheaths at his back and leapt forward. Magneto did not even wave his hand, but Taipan was hurled through the ceiling, fully half his body disappearing into the plaster and wood panelling. The remaining girl, \*Tess, did he call her? As in tesseract, perhaps?\*, shoved the other male forward. The youth looked at Magneto, his eyes weird. He raised his arms and Lehnsherer prepared himself for an attack. What he got instead was a surprise. The youth waved his arms as if conducting a symphony only he could hear, then sat down on the ground, grinning up at Taipan's feet where they twitched on the wall.

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"Your most powerful operative seems to have been a bit of a disappointment."

"A diagnostic error. We had thought an additional hallucinogenic supplement would enhance the usual extent of his powers."

"Bad enough he requires narcotics to be of any use. That error almost got your entire force killed."

"Nonsense. Their relative youth and anonymity ensured a measure of restraint in Magneto."

"Perhaps. From recent reports, Magneto is not the man he once was. Tess..."

"...was an unfortunate development."

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"Well girl? Will you strike at me too?" he asked. His voice clearly implied he expected such an attack to fail miserably. Tess drew a shuddering breath and reached out with her power, attempting to open a warp directly in the centre of Magneto's being. The master of magnetism, used to fighting energy manipulating opponents and well aware of his own personal fields, felt the intrusion and reacted. He disrupted the attack, tracing the lines of power back of the girl and systematically shredding them. Her scream was sudden and absolute. She dropped to the ground and convulsed.

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"Did you know she had a heart condition?" Gyrich asked.

Bowser shrugged.

"We did not think it would affect her powers."

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The girl's attack had caused a minor ripple in his own energy fields. Minor, but along with the feedback from the earlier attack, enough to weaken him. Magneto, mutant master of magnetism, studied the faces of his attackers briefly, his own expression unreadable. He gestured towards a wall. It buckled inward and he flew from the room on a stream of electromagnetic force.

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"Of course, our recovery team was standing by and quickly extracted the operatives from the scene."

"So it was a disaster."

"Not at all. The mission was a complete success."

"What?"

"At the very instant Magneto engaged the operatives, a SHIELD hacker team accessed the Swiss bank accounts Chase Manhattan was in charge of handling. Magneto's own magnetic powers erased the records in Manhattan, SHIELD erased the Swiss accounts, and we successfully denied the mutant terrorist access to a key resource by his own hand. We did after all, arrange for him to discover the account was being tampered with, thus necessitating the visit to the bank."

"You realize, of course, he would never be so foolish as to entrust all his resources to one bank, or even two."

"Of course. But even so, being denied almost sixty million dollars will surely wound him financially, if not in fact. One step at a time, Mr. Gyrich. One step at a time."

"You intend to send your operatives against him again then?"

"Most unlikely. Now that he has taken their measure, I doubt they would even last half as long and end up half as well. But they did give him pause. Something very few have managed to do. I believe that has proven that contingent on some additional training and conditioning, Special Force X will more than fill the gap left by X-Factor and the Hound program."

Peter Henry Gyrich stood. He looked at the man sitting across from him, a man who had risen to a position of some power in Washington over the political bodies of men and women who had constantly underestimated him. Anthony Bowser was a dangerous man. And now he was holding the short leash of a small force of potentially deadly young men and women. Did America need the asset he represented? Gyrich made his decision.

"I will recommend to the Committee that your project should be granted an extended trial period, subject to reevaluation with no notice. I think you're playing a very dangerous game, Bowser. For all

our sakes, you'd best be in control of it."

"I am always in control, mister Gyrich. The SFX will be no different."

"So you say."

"So I know."

"We'll see. By the way, SFX'?"

"Special Force X. The succesor, and vast improvement, on the X-Factor and Hound projects. And unlike like its predecessors, SFX will remain confidential and controlled for as long as it is needed."

Gyrich hesitated, nodded once, and walked from the room. The door swung shut behind him and Anthony Bowser allowed himself a small smile. Of course he was in control. Of himself. Of the SFX, and soon... who knows? No one would stand in his way. No one.

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"What will you do, Ororo?"

The co-leader of the X-Men looked out at the city of new York stretched out beneath the Empire State Building. Forge leaned against a railing and waited. He knew her well enough to allow a moment of thought.

"We cannot allow these young mutants to become the tools of men like Bowser. I will consult with the others and we will decide on how to proceed. This travesty will not be allowed to continue."

"Even if it brings the X-Men into direct conflict with the US government?"

"Even so, my dear friend. Even so."

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Magneto leaned back into the plush depths of an antique lounge chair. A robotic servant, powered by lines of magnetic force that ran throughout his sanctuary, brought him a pot of tea and floated idly by his side, ignored. He played back the confrontation at the bank again and again in his mind. These children had not presented a serious threat, but they had been enough to wound him, to distract him enough to allow an unknown enemy to deny him a small fortune in resources. He would recover, physically and financially. He always did, stronger than before. Yet these... children... or young men and women, to be precise, pulled at his thoughts. Some, perhaps all of them... They had potential.

Potential he might be able to put to use.

\*-\*-\*-\*-END (for now)\*-\*-\*-\*-\*

Hiya, kiddies... C'est moi, Abyss, back with a story that did not feature a single predatory bunny slipper for a change. I would like to thank;

- Tapestry, Indigo, Ms. Marvel, & Matt Nute for their help creating Nihil and for beta'ing the story. (And yes, Tappy, Bones does have a pretty sick power... heeheehee... )

- Alara Rogers for double-checking my Magneto use.

- Junkmail and Sabrebabe for beta'ing as well.

Any and all email about this story would be greatly appreciated. Even a simple 'I liked it' would be great. Who knows...? If a few of you out there like this dysfunctional bunch of mutants enough to write, I may just have to use them again. ;]

Raves, expressions of disgust at Bones blowing himself up, and pasta recipes can be sent to:

Abyss

As always, keep reading, keep writing, and... Keep the Faith.

Abyss, August 1998.

End  
file.